A SUMMARIE PLATFORM OF The heads of a Body of Practicall DIVINITY,

Which the Miniſters of the Proteſtant Churches abroad have ſued for, and which is farther enlarged in a Treatiſe intituled,

An earneſt Plea for Goſpel-Communion, *&c.*

[illegible] (Jas Ussher)

LONDON,
Printed for *Richard Wodenothe* in *Leaden hall-ſtr.*
1654.

The Copie of a Letter written by Doctor *Usher*, the *Primate* of *Armach*, to Master *Dury*, concerning the Publishing of this *Body of Practical Divinitie*: according to the premised *Model*.

Master *Dury*,

I Am glad that you are still willing to take some paines about the procuring of a body of practical Divinity, a work which I have long wished for, and which formerly my heart was in, and my hand would have been in, if God had been pleased to continue our Peace; for when you brought over the Letters from the Forreign Churches, wherein they made it their Request unto us, to Gratifie their Churches with some Endeavours about the Compilement of this Work, which were seconded by a Letter from the Ministers in and about London *unto me, when I was in* Ireland, *many yeers ago, I was very glad of the motion, and laid it seriously to heart, and conferred with some of my Brethren about it; that we might bring the work to some Perfection. Doctor* Downam *the then Bishop of* London-Derry, *was a man whose studies were much bent that way, for which cause it was referred to him, and he readily did undertake the task, to draw up a Model or Plaisform according to which that Systeme or Body might be Compiled, that the Ministers who had written to me, might be able to chuse their tasks, and set themselves awork about it; this Model he promised to send unto me to revise it, before it should be imparted to the foresaid Ministers, that in our joint name it might be sent unto them. But he either for want of health, or some other impediments did not expedite the Work before his death, & when the troubles of* Scotland *did begin, which had some Reflexion upon us in* Ireland: *& I being come over hither, he the Bishop of* Derry *being dead, the*

troubles of Ireland taking fire at the Proceedings of the then Parliament here, and the great Distractions of this and the other two Nations increasing ever since; I could not do what was desired of me, & what I heartily desired might have been done, and will yet may be done: for it will never be too late or unseasonable to set upon such an enterprize: Therefore by your solicitation and pains you can oblige those that in the Universities, or in and about this City, are able and willing to undertake it, I think you will do a work very acceptable to all that are Godly, and Profitable to all the Churches at home and abroad. Let me therefore intreat you to procure, that whilest there is any appearance of doing good to our Generation; we may not neglect the opportunity. As for the Model of the Heads which you have shewed unto me, I shall advise this, that the Precognitions may not be insisted upon largely; but as briefly and substantially as may be; and if some References be made unto such Authours, as handle the heads of the Precognitions more at large, it may give satisfaction to such as will be more curious and desirous to see things amply handled. Secondly, my advise is; that the work may be controlled to as few hands as may be: who may meet and confer together about it, when they are perfecting their tasks. Thirdly, I would not have the Work too large and voluminous, for several reasons, yet as full of matter as can be; and where enlargements may be thought useful, references may be made to such Authours as use them most effectually. Lastly, concerning the Cases of Conscience which should be handled in this Body, I think they may be brought in and inserted under every head of matter whereunto they belong. This is for the Present that which I would suggest. I pray God direct and assist you and all those that go about it; and what I shall be able to do towards the Encouragement of able Workmen therein; you may be confident shall not be wanting from

Your loving Friend,

Ja. Armachanus.

From my Study, the 14th.
of *Decemb.* 1653.

The Direction, To my loving Friend,
Master *John Dury*, these.

A

SUMMARY PLATFORM

Of the Heads of a Bodie of Practicall Divinity.

BY the Body of Practicall Divinity is meant a full and orderly Collection of all Divine Truths, relating to the *Practice of Piety*, to be digested into a *System*, or some other kinde of Book. The Scope then of this Book should be to hold forth the whole *Doctrine of the life of Godlinesse*, in an *exact description* of all the *Precognitions*, *Principles* and *Parts* thereof; with a *Resolution* of the *materiall doubts* which may be incident thereunto.

This Doctrine may be delivered two wayes:

One way Positively, by holding forth the undoubted Truths, as they are Demonstrable from their proper grounds.

Ano-

Another way Doubtfully by resolving all the Cases of Conscience which are raised thereupon.

The Positive Doctrine will be compleat, if it deliver three things.

Firstly, the Precognitions which are to be presupposed, that it may be acknowledged, that there is a life of Godliness.

Secondly, the Principles which are to be received and believed, that the life of Godliness may have a being, and be entertained in the soul.

Thirdly, the Parts which are to be wrought out in the whole man; that the life of Godliness may be powerfully effectual in all his faculties and wayes.

Of the Precognitions.

The Precognitions are certain Truths, which presuppose a man only to be rational; and are to be made out unto him as such; therefore they must not be deduced and offered unto him as Scriptural Oracles, but as Conclusions evinced from the grounds of sound reason, and may be referred to six Heads.

1 That there is a Supreme Power over all things visible and invisible, which amongst all men is called God.

2 That this Supreme Power is to be feared, worshipped, and glorified by man.

3 That this Supreme Power is a Rewarder of those that seek after him with fear, to worship and glorifie him.

4 That the Writings of the Prophets, Evangelists, and Apostles in the Old and New Testament, are the Word of God.

5 That these Writings were given to teach men the true way to seek after God by Fearing, Worshipping, and Glorifying him.

6 That there shall be a time wherein God will judge men according to the Works wherein they have or have not Feared, Worshipped and Glorified him.

Of

Of the Principles.

The Principles are certain Truths which presuppose a man to believe that the Scriptures are Gods Word, and upon this supposal, this fundamental position is to be made out, which is the root of all the Principles of Godliness, viz.

That in the Scriptures God doth hold forth a Covenant to be entertained between himself & men, which being believed, two things are after and to be delivered from the Scriptures.

First, how the Covenant is revealed therein.

Secondly, how it is made and confirmed with men.

Concerning the revealing of the Covenant in the Scriptures, the Doctrine of the Canonical Books (which are the only true instrument of the Covenant) as they are distinguishable from the *Apocryphal*, is to be delivered; where two things are to be made out.

First, what the true Characters of Canonical Scripture are; and that the *Apocryphal* Books have them not.

Secondly, that in the Canonical Books, the Truth and Covenant of God, is held forth by Divine Authority Infallibly, perfectly and evidently.

Concerning the making of the Covenant, two things are to be held forth from the Scriptures.

First, what the Tenour of the Covenant is, which God doth make with men.

Secondly, what the Motives are which oblige them in conscience to entertain it.

Concerning the Tenour of the Covenant three things are to be opened.

First, who the persons are concerned in the Covenant.

Secondly, what the form of the contract, and the terms of the agreement are, between these persons.

Thirdly, what the performance and accomplishment is of that which is contracted and agreed upon.

The Persons concerned in the Covenant, are God, Mankinde, and Jesus Christ.

God

God is considered here as he is the Authour of the Covenant, and as such only revealed, and to be known by us.

Mankinde is considered as he is bound to depend upon God by a Covenant.

Jesus Christ is considered as he is the Alone Mediator between God and man by a Covenant, in respect

Of his twofold Nature, as being both God and man in one person, and consequently a true *Medium* and centre of all God-manly properties.

Of his threefold Office, as being the great Prophet, the High Priest, and the only King of all Saints in heaven and in earth.

Of his twofold state of life, the first of Humiliation on earth, the second of Exaltation in heaven, and the works of his Mediation between God and man in both estates.

The form of the contract and the terms of the agreement are to be opened in shewing two things.

That the manner of Gods contracting is with none directly and properly, but with his only begotten Son, and with mankinde only in, by, and through him.

That the things promised by God, and the terms upon which they are promised, are distinguishable,

First, as the promises are made to Christ.

Secondly, as they are made to the believers in him.

And lastly, as they are made to the professers of his Name.

The performance and accomplishment of that which is promised and agreed upon to be done on all sides, is to be opened in two things:

1. How Christ by his obedience and sufferings having performed all that he did undertake towards God for mankinde, did by his death make over all the promises of the Covenant by way of Testament unto such as believe and profess in his Name; that from him by faith they might become theirs directly and properly.

2. How the Father by his power and glory made good unto Christ all his promises of raising him from the dead,

by

by setting him at his right hand, and by giving him all power in heaven & earth to administer his own Testament by sending forth the Holy Ghost: for, through, in and by the preaching of the Gospel: And in this Administration of the Testament of Christ by the Spirit in the Gospel there is to be opened

1 A general call given, and an offer of Grace made by Christ on Gods part unto all that hear the Gospel.

2 A particular application of Grace dispensed according to Gods own will, whereby the terms of the Covenant are made good,

To all believers, by their effectual calling and conversion unto God, and by their constant perseverance in grace unto the end.

To all professors, by their gathering of themselves together into one body, and by their mutual edification and growth through the unity of the Spirit, and the communion of holy duties.

The tenour of the covenant being thus opened, the Motives which are powerful to oblige mens consciencies to entertain the offer, and keep the tenour thereof, are to be delivered, and may be reduced to three heads. *viz.*

1 To the happiness which in this life befals to those who are in Covenant with God. See *Psal.*25.10.

2 To the obligation which lies upon the consciences of men to obey Gods Commandements and his calls.

3 To the condition wherein men shall be at the day of Judgement.

When these heads are handled which concern the making of the Covenant; then the Truth concerning the confirmation of the Covenant is to be opened, to which head doth belong the Doctrine of the signes annexed unto the administration thereof amongst the professors; where two things are chiefly to be insisted upon.

1 How they are instituted and appointed by God, to be outward means to assure us of his meaning; and to seal up the realty of his working and effecting the tenour of the Covenant in the inward man.

2 How they are to be used by us, that we may be confirmed in Grace thereby, and receive the effect of that for which God hath appointed them.

Hitherto the Doctrines have been mentioned, which relate unto the principle of the life of Godlineſs which is the Covenant of Grace; now follow the heads of Doctrine which contein the parts of this life, which are two:

The one conteining the ſubſtantial, the other the circumſtantial life of Godlineſs.

The Subſtantial life is the power and practice of all the truth, whereby God is enjoyed in the Covenant; and the Doctrine thereof may contein two parts. The firſt ſhould hold forth the Material parts of the life of Godlineſs diſtinctly. The ſecond the formal union of theſe parts in the whole man conjoyntly.

The Material parts of the ſubſtantial life of Godlineſs, make up the inward, and the outward man of God.

The inward man of God is the New Creature, whereof the Doctrine to be delivered ſhould contein theſe heads:

1 What the Regenerate ſtate of the ſoul is; and how it is wrought by the Spirit of God.

2 How it is diſcerned and differenced from the unregenerate ſtate of the ſoul.

3 What the acts and motions of the ſpiritual life are, wherein the regenerate ſoul hath ſecret fellowſhip with God.

4 What the deceits are of natural imaginations, of ſuperſtitious practices, and of Satanical delusions mixing himſelf therewith, whereby he doth transform himſelf into an Angel of light, and whereby the ſoul is bewitched and poſſeſſed with an unclean ſpirit, inſtead of being renewed by the Holy Ghoſt.

The outward man of God is the ſtate of life, wherein all our wayes are through the inward principle made conformable unto the heavenly calling. Here the Doctrines are to be delivered,

1 Of ſelf-denial, in reſpect of ungodlineſs and worldly luſts which cleaving to our nature are fomented from without in our fleſh.

2 Of self resignation, or of offering up our wayes to walk after the Spirit; by

The life of Sobriety in respect of our selves.

The life of Righteousnes in respect of our Neighbours.

The life of Religiousnes in respect of God.

The formal Union of these parts stands in the life of universal obedience, whereby the whole man in all his acts is inwardly and outwardly subordinate unto the will of God, according to the tenour of his Law; where the Doctrine of the ten Commandements should be delivered in three things.

1 In the Rules of interpreting the Commandements.

2 In the Abstract of Duties; shewing how all vertues commanded, and vices forbidden are to be referred to the ten words of the Law given upon Mount *Sinai*.

3 In the spiritual watch to be kept over ones self and over others; where the means and helps to duties, & the signes and causes of sins are to be laid open.

The circumstantial life of Godlines is the state of the life, wherein we walk circumspectly before God, in respect of our severrl relations and callings; where the duties relating to the circumstances of our natural, and of our spiritual states and callings severally and to both jointly are to be opened.

Our natural states & callings are differences by the properties of sexes; and by the several kindes of humane societies; and the relations arising between the members thereof.

The sexes being male and female; the works proper to each of them are to be described, and the limits of their power and authority in their employments set forth, from the preeminencie of the properties which are in the one above the other.

The natural societies of men arise either from the unity of blood, or of outward interests.

From the unity of blood there is

1 The society of man and wife to propagate mankinde.

2 The society of pareuts and children.

3 The society of brethren and sisters, of kindred and allies.

From the unity of outward interests there is

1 The society of master and servant.

2 The society of Magistrate and Subject.

3 The society of Proprietor and Tenant.

The

The ſpiritual ſocieties ariſe in the Church from the ſeveral conditions and joynt relations,

1 Of members to each other, and to their Officers.

2 Of Officers to each other, and to their members.

Of all theſe ſtated and relations the duties ſhould be laid open as they are preſcribed in the Word diſtinctly.

Then the ſtate and calling which hath a reſpect to all ſorts of ſocieties joyntly, as being the ſeed-plot and ſeminary of all the vertues to be exerciſed therein, is the ſtate of Schools, where ought to be delivered:

1 What kinde of Schools ought to be conſtituted ſuitable to the principles and life of Chriſtianity.

2 To whom the care of erecting, and reforming of Schools doth belong; and what neceſſity there is of this work.

3 What the peculiar duties are of School-maſters and Miſtreſſes; and of Scholars of both ſexes.

Hitherto the firſt and poſitive part of the Body of Practical Divinity hath been delineated; the other part which ſhould contein the Caſes of Conſcience may be divided into two parts; whereof the firſt ſhould be a general direction how all Caſes ought to be reſolved: the ſecond ſhould be a ſpecial collection of the moſt conſiderable Caſes which ought to be reſolved diſtinctly by themſelves.

In the general direction two things ſhould be taught,

1 How all believers ſhould endeavour to reſolve their own doubts according to the Analogie of Faith, Hope and Charity, by the general principles of the Covenant; and the fundamental Rules of duties pertaining to Godlineſs.

2 How Teachers or experienced Chriſtians ſhould endeavour to help the weak and doubting profeſſors to reſolve their Caſes, by reflecting upon the nature of the ſubject whereunto the doubt doth belong; and by conſidering the capacity of the perſon who maketh the ſcruple, and the occaſion upon which it is raiſed.

In the ſpecial collection of particular Caſes the chief thing advifable is concerning the ordering of them; that they ſhould be ranked in the method, whereby they relate unto the parts of the poſitive Doctrine; and as they may from thence ariſe in the minde of a weak Chriſtian; ſo that whether the Caſes be collected and put into one diſtinct part of the body by themſelves, or divided ſeverally and diſperſed into the whole body under the heads of the matter whereunto they belong, the method may ſtill be the ſame, to finde them out upon all occaſions when a reſolution is to be ſought after.

FINIS.